

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF AB 447**

by

Jeffrey Spitzer-Resnick

Managing Attorney

January 10, 2012

As many of you know, Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) is Wisconsin's protection and advocacy agency for people with disabilities. As Managing Attorney for DRW's Schools & Civil Rights Team, much of my work involves improving the system of special and regular education for children with disabilities in Wisconsin schools. To that end, I am pleased to provide this testimony in support of AB 447.

Far too many students with disabilities do not graduate because they lose interest in school or are stuck in an educational track which is not a good match for their learning style. This leads to far too many adults with disabilities that remain unemployed or under-employed in our communities. The hands-on training provided through a vocational/technical diploma has great potential for many non-traditional learners and we are excited for opportunities which will not only keep a student engaged in school, but lead to competitive employment at real wages.

That being said, DRW had some concerns about this bill when it was first introduced. We are pleased that the sponsors and Education committee chairs worked together with stakeholders to produce this improved bill. Thus, the current bill accomplishes a number of important things that DRW supports:

1. The bill ensures that the vocational/technical diploma is a value added diploma by making sure that the vocational/technical educational additions do not water down the currently required academic requirements for a regular diploma.
2. The bill ensures that the vocational/technical diploma must be in a subject or subjects as determined by each school board which authorizes such a diploma. This will help to ensure that the student receives a vocational/technical education in the subject or subjects that will enable that student to be job ready upon graduation, and it helps to provide employers with confidence that such graduates are indeed job ready upon graduation.
3. The bill requires that for all special education students who plan to graduate with a vocational diploma, such students Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) must set forth the specific course of study which the student needs to obtain such a diploma. Not only will this help students with disabilities graduate with necessary vocational/technical skills to enter the workforce upon graduation, but it

will also mitigate against a premature graduation for those students with moderate to severe disabilities who have the right to remain in school up to age 21 if they do not graduate.

In sum, then, DRW urges committee members to vote in favor of AB 447, as we believe that this bill represents a positive step forward in preparing students for the workforce, including those with disabilities.